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## THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN VALUES OF RELIGION

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Today civilization itself is in the melting-pot; nothing escapes, religion least of all. Yet underneath the current discontent with the forms, the beliefs, and the institutions of traditional religion, there is substantially universal agreement that there is something in religion that must survive. Human life needs religion, or an adequate moral equivalent for it. On another point, too, there is agreement: namely, that the historical religions, whether true or false, have contributed elements of profound value to the faithful. Religions which every modern man would regard as almost wholly made up of false beliefs have inspired and strengthened life, have made men happy, and have given them something to live for. Christian Science and Roman Catholicism cannot be true; but both heal the sick. A religion does not need to be true in order to be valuable; it needs only to be believed.

But at this point there arises a question. Can religion survive unless it is believed to be true? This question answers itself in the negative. Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers. Now the faith of religion has in the past usually expressed itself as a belief in a relation of man's life to superhuman reality, generally conceived of as personal. That is to say, the human values of religion (as it has existed) depend on faith in a more-than-human value, a God or gods above and beyond me and us. Now as soon as one begins to talk about the reality of God, or mentions more-than-human objects of religious faith, one has launched on the sea of metaphysical theology. Religion is a blessing to life, it appears;

but theology and metaphysics are abstract, difficult, never ending, and sometimes in their outcome destructive of religious belief: they seem to be a curse. Is it possible to retain the blessing and escape the curse? If we hold that religion is merely human, we have been bravely freed of the puzzles of metaphysics and the dogmas of theology. But have we thrown the child out with the bath? Would it be better for religion to keep her faith in the objective and real values which she has prized, and accept her ancient task of negotiating peace with the intriguing diplomats of science and philosophy?

Stating the problem in the terms of current thought, it would read: Is the objective reference of religious faith important and fundamental to religion, or is it a makeshift which biological and social forces have devised in order to protect the sensitive life of the merely human values? The aim of the present discussion is to call attention to the importance of this problem and to discuss certain of its aspects.

The issue raised by this problem is not that between the friends and the foes of religion, but represents a radical division among its friends. On the one hand a positivistic,<sup>1</sup> and on the other a metaphysical, theory of religious values; accompanying this division, radically different conceptions of religious life. The positivistic attitude regards God and all objects of religious faith as wholly immanent in human life here and now, and as having no other existence than as guiding principles of human life; the metaphysical attitude regards the religious objects and values as pointing to a reality that has cosmic, transcendent, and eternal existence. For positivism, the God idea is only a symbol for certain facts of human experience; for religious metaphysics, God is the real power controlling the universe and conserving its values. The opposition between these two points of view is the central problem of philosophy of religion at the present time.

<sup>1</sup> The term positivism is used in this paper to describe a general tendency in current thought. It refers to no one "school."

The positivistic tradition, founded by Comte, has exerted far-reaching influence. In the form given to it by Durkheim, it has acquired great prestige and influence not only in France, but also in England and America. By this school, religion is regarded as a phenomenon of group life. God is a name for tribal or racial or world-wide human consciousness; immortality means that the group and its values survive when the individual perishes. Worship, ritual, prayer, mysticism, all that religion means, is but the symbol of the authority of the group over the individual, or of the devotion of the individual to the group. Similar ideas come to expression in Professor Roy Wood Sellars' book, *The Next Step in Religion*, which advocates restricting religion to "loyalty to the values of life," and the elimination of all supernaturalism, such as is involved in belief in God and personal immortality. Professor G. Stanley Hall in his recent *Morale, the Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct*, takes a like position. Professor John Dewey's lectures on *Reconstruction in Philosophy* bring out most clearly the essentially positivistic character of his instrumentalism, which treats religion as a means of social control, not a relation to superhuman values. Many voices today join in the positivistic chorus, "Glory to man in the highest," and religion is regarded as a purely human undertaking, humanly initiated and humanly consummated. Thus religion avoids scholastic theology; joins hands with empirical science; and also (not the least of blessings) becomes quite democratic. For God the King is overthrown; and positivism does not dally long with the fancy of God as president. Presidents and candidates are so numerous and so incalculable in their behavior that a presidential deity might be even more arbitrary and embarrassing than a regal one. The truly democratic residuum is the apotheosis of society, the deification of the general will.

Positivism, however, is not the only vocal tendency of the present. The belief that religion is essentially metaphysical,

and its values more than human, is held by many of its philosophical interpreters. Windelband found the very essence of religion in its reference to a transcendent reality; so that he regards Comte's "religion of humanity" as a mere caricature of religion. W. E. Hocking holds that "religion would vanish if the whole tale of its value were shifted to the sphere of human affairs." G. P. Adams pleads for a Platonism which makes the values of our human world depend on our apprehension of superhuman values. Pratt in his *Religious Consciousness* points out that it is bad psychology to confine ourselves to the merely pragmatic factors in the God idea, because "it neglects altogether certain real elements in the religious consciousness whether found in philosopher, priest, or humble worshipper—men who through all the ages have truly meant by 'God' something more than the idea of God, something genuinely 'transcendent.'" Fitch's recent Lyman Beecher Lectures at Yale on "Preaching and Paganism" argue, as against naturalism and humanism, for supernatural and superhuman sources of religious life. The objectivity of religious values is also in the forefront of the important contributions made by Pringle-Pattison and Sorley.

It is not our purpose to discuss the views held by these opposing groups, but rather to examine religion itself with reference to some of the issues involved in the problem under consideration. Now, on the face of it, religious life is objective. It holds, as James has said, to the reality of the unseen; "it is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call something there more deep and more general than any of the special and particular senses." The positivist, however, would argue that this objectivity is but a symbol for certain social needs and interests. The critic of positivism would have to show, then, that religion has a meaning and performs a function that cannot be exhaustively described in merely human terms, whether individual or social. Accordingly, we

shall try to show that objective reference in religion is only one manifestation of a deep-lying and universal need for objectivity; we shall then consider the relation of the more-than-human values to the human desire for certainty; we shall then seek to show how a few specific religious experiences find satisfaction in a more-than-human; and finally we shall consider objections that a positivist might urge against the metaphysical interpretation of religion.

The need for objectivity is one of the most universal needs of man's rational nature. Solipsism cannot be refuted without surreptitiously assuming that there are other persons and an objective order. All proof, we find, presupposes and implies something real other than ourselves. Solipsism is refuted, not by argument, but by life's demand for rationality, otherness, reality, objectivity. This need for objectivity is at the basis of science, philosophy, and religion. "Some passion for objectivity," says W. E. Hocking, "quite prior to other passions, there is at the bottom of all idea; a passion not wholly of an unreligious nature, not wholly unakin to the love of God." Man always finds himself by finding something else. The most normal life is the life that is forgetting itself in noble causes. Now it appears that the center of gravity of the positivistic account of religion is subjective, even though social; and a social solipsism leaves humanity in the same abhorrent and satisfied state as individualistic solipsism leaves the human unit. The center of gravity of the metaphysical account lies beyond the self; one who conceives religion thus will reach out through social relationships toward God.

Another profound need of our life is that for certainty. To mention this need appears at first like a mockery. Of what element in human life, save perhaps the empty forms of logical thinking, can we say, it is beyond all need of revision, incapable of being altered by time and circumstance? There are indeed many beliefs of which we are, as we say, morally certain, to which we have committed our lives. But can we

attribute an absolute logical certainty to the beliefs we live by? To assert that religion meets the need for certainty does not mean that it is logically proved. It means rather that religion intends to be a committing of the life to the absolutely real, to a cause that cannot fail, to the eternal God. The legitimate certainty which religion affords to the believer is the consciousness that though my creed may not perfectly apprehend infinity, yet that which my faith is seeking, and in relation to which my religious life is lived, is the actual Rock of Ages. It is the real God, and not flawless formularies or even social programs that men need as the firm foundation of their assurance in life. The formularies and programs are an essential part of the human task; but faith in them is no substitute religiously for faith in God.

So much for the more general considerations. We turn now to inquire how specific aspects of religious experience actually seek to attain these more-than-human values. Take, for example, the case of communion with the divine, the sense of intimate personal relationship between the soul and God. In this experience, the essential meaning is that the whole human enterprise, be it regarded as individual or as social, is subordinate to, and derives its meaning from, the Eternal Source of Existence and Value. It is not merely that man needs a Great Socius; his companion must also be good and almighty if man's needs are to be met. The positivistic account is not an interpretation but a denial of the significance of communion with God.

In our day religious experience very commonly takes the form of social service. Men find God by serving their neighbors. Positivists find God nowhere else than in human relations; humanity or human aspiration is God. And yet it is precisely in social experiences that the significance of the more-than-human values is most clear. Religion in its genuine historical forms has always regarded the social problem as in part a metaphysical one. The dependence of all men on God makes

human relations not less but more intimate. The faith that the ideals of the moral and religious order are more real and objective than the rocks and the lightnings imparts a sanction to morality that a purely empirical ethics can never claim. In discussing the need of such religious sanctions it is often forgotten that the mores of civilization have developed under the influence of such sanctions; and that the attempts to build up a morality without them overlooks "man's need of metaphysics." Religion has manifestly abused her metaphysical prerogative, and has driven many to choose a non-religious wholesome regard for the affairs of this world rather than ascetic otherworldliness. But religion at her best has always prayed, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." The religious attitude toward service thus contains every factor that enters into the humanitarian, and adds to it the vision of a supernatural goal. The cup of cold water "in my name" is different from a mere cup of cold water; if the meaning of "in my name" be appreciated, the act of generosity is more likely to happen again, gives a more permanent benefit to the recipient, and unites the two persons concerned more closely by an invisible and holy tie. In a human relationship the spiritual life that is expressed is the most significant fact in it. True it is that economic and social conditions are such for the majority of mankind that this spiritually significant part of life is utterly unable to come to expression. All the more reason that the higher spiritual values should be cherished as a sacred trust by those that can appreciate them against the day when all can. Otherwise, with all improvement of environmental conditions, there is no small danger that the emancipated worker in the industrial democracy of the future may be really no better off than the wage-slave of the present order. Where there is no vision the people perish as certainly as when they must make bricks without straw.

Religion also seeks to assert its contact with the more-than-human through its faith in human immortality. Now

this belief is a peculiarly rich field for the positivist. To him it means that the social influence of the individual is endless (immortality of influence), or that the group or the group mind is thought of as never dying (immortality of the social mind), or that social values are permanent. Religion does, in some sense, affirm all this. Immortality is religion's reply to the apparent destruction of all value by death; for religion cannot admit that what is truly worthful can perish. But the positivistic account of immortality can refer only to the preservation of values by succeeding generations of men on this earth. As astronomical time goes, there appears little reason for regarding such permanence as more than a few cosmic seconds in the day's work. The positivist may reply that the average man's watch is in the bondage of relativity, and that cosmic time does not enter into his calculations. But is not the answer of Koheleth truer to the depths of man's nature, that "he hath set eternity in his heart"? If so, the true religious function of the idea of immortality is metaphysical. Religion needs an objective conservation of objective values; values (it is generally agreed) are dependent on personality; and personality will certainly not be conserved forever in the world of space and time that positivism knows. Hence only actual personal immortality will satisfy unsophisticated religion. If it be argued that values might perchance be somehow conserved, we know not how, even after all human life is forever dumb, religion would indeed in her heart of hearts murmur, "Thy will be done." But to accept such a position makes more demands on faith than does the belief that persons, our highest values, will survive—by surviving!

Everywhere, then, religion asserts itself to be more than a useful set of beliefs that will help the individual and society to function more efficiently in the world of space and time. All creeds and faiths that have taken root in history point to some revelation of truth, of eternal values, of a more-than-human by which the human is saved and glorified. If the

benefits of religion are to accrue to a human soul, that soul must have its face set toward the heavenly Jerusalem.

The assertion of the metaphysical position does not mean to imply that positivism is wholly wrong. There remains the truth that even false religious beliefs have been of great value to believers; and that there is doubtless more error than truth in every human credo. It is also true that all religious beliefs have a social function, and that many positivists are veritable prophets of the higher social values. Furthermore an examination of almost any positivistic argument will show that it is concerned with some genuine item of religious life.

A familiar attack on the objectivity of value will illustrate this statement. Values must be subjective (so positivists contend) because to be of value means to be desired; the value of anything consists in its relation to our consciousness. Nothing in the universe is of value except as it is an object of interest to human beings. If this means all that positivism interprets it to mean, it is fatal to the metaphysical pretensions of religious values. But at the same time positivism is here emphasizing one of the dearest truths of religion—namely, that all value is personal, and apart from personality there is no value. Yet there remains the opposition; positivism says: no value apart from human consciousness; religion says: no value, in my domain, that is not more than human. Now, theistic personalism may be regarded as a synthetic view. All values, it would say to positivism, are indeed satisfactions of consciousness, but they are more than satisfactions, they are laws, standards, ideals, norms which prescribe to consciousness how it ought to experience, what ought to satisfy it; when I seek truth, I do not merely seek satisfaction, I seek logical coherence; when I seek goodness or beauty I am trying to obey their laws. To religion theism would say, Yes, it is true that your values point to and presuppose an order of reality other than mere subjective states of satisfaction. But what is that other? Theism answers, It, too, is a person: only for per-

sons can obligations, ideals, values be real: in the conscious life of God is the objective reality of those values which truly ought to satisfy human life. Those values are subjective, because they would not be experienced as values unless they did satisfy human life; but they are also objective because they are experienced in relation to a reality that has supreme value in itself, namely, a personal God. Thus the positivistic argument for the subjectivity of value may be seen to play into the hands of a metaphysical personalism that does fuller justice to the facts of religious life.

The positivist might temporarily admit for the sake of argument that there may perhaps be a divine order of value, divine purposes for life to attain, divine standards for men to obey. But he might go on to insist that it profits little to grant the existence of such an order if we are incapable of knowing its nature and laws. Dogmas collide, revelations contradict, and philosophy is a "strife of systems." Religion stands looking into heaven; but it sees such an amazing array of conflicting data in the skies that the positivist almost appears to be justified when he asserts that the metaphysical reference of religion is a mere gesture, an empty form; and that all metaphysical content is patently self-refuting. But is the positivist's case here conclusive against the objectivity of religious values? If so, it is equally conclusive against all objective truth whatever; and we fall back into solipsism. In what realm is there not difference of opinion, more or less contradictory apprehension of truth, development and change in our grasp of it? In what realm is it not true that our rational ideals rescue us from chaos? Only by an ideal of a cosmos, a world of law and order, are we able to distinguish our fancies and imaginations from the perceptions of real objects. Yet this ideal of a perfectly orderly world in which all relations and causes are perfectly clear and rational has not yet been realized by science; it remains precisely an ideal by which we test our fragmentary knowledge, recognize

unsolved problems, and gradually build up an increasingly clear grasp on the real world of nature. So (as Sorley has pointed out) may it also be with our knowledge of moral values, and of the values revealed in religious experience. The ideal of a coherent system of objective religious values is the principle by which the mind tests, seeks to interpret and organize its religious experiences. It may be that it is better, both religiously and logically, for the human race to believe metaphysical errors regarding God than for it to commit the more serious error of denying the metaphysical interest which is essential to real religion and logic. At any rate, we may reply to the positivist that, so far as imperfection, contradiction, and change are concerned, knowledge of religious values is in the same sort of logical situation as our knowledge of nature. No human knowledge is perfect; but our imperfect knowledge presupposes and is judged by an ideal perfection.

Still another objection may be urged by positivists. It may be argued that the belief in the objectivity of value is plainly inconsistent with the fact that some values, at least, are products of the creative imagination. Mr. C. C. J. Webb has recently pointed out that the artist is apt to regard an objective order of values in a Divine Personality "as suggestive of a tyrannical Power, cruelly or fiendishly denying its rights to that impulse of self-expression which is his very life and holier to him than any repressive law can possibly be" (*Divine Personality and Human Life*, p. 91). Thus, if art is a value, then value experience is no mere reading off of given objective order, but the creation of a realm of beauty in human life. Indeed, the whole life of value may be regarded as a work of art; and it is hard to conceive of any values from which this element of creativity would be entirely absent. Where this creative task of intelligence is not fully recognized, the objectivity of values is in danger of being practically the same as a belief that the given standards and beliefs of one's group are to be identified with the eternal will of God and the

structure of the universe; Dewey's call for reconstruction makes us acutely aware of this peril. Hypostatization of the *status quo* inevitably results in spiritual stagnation. If one already has the eternal values, what more is there to learn? It is psychologically explicable if this sort of thing calls forth the socialistic battle-cry, Drive the gods from heaven and capitalism from the earth!

Thus the metaphysical theory appears to have the twofold disadvantage of excluding creativity and of dooming life to stagnation. The illiberal dogmatism that sometimes accompanies religious life is an illustration of the concrete outcome. Yet when this is said, it is by no means admitted that the main charge is true. If the theistic account of values be correct, the objectivity of a value does not reside in some static impersonal entity which our evaluations are merely trying to know, but rather in a set of obligations which the Eternal Person imposes on himself, and which ought to be the law and the satisfaction of every finite person. If the more-than-human values are of such a sort, may it not be that the principle of free creativity belongs to the eternally valid realm, as one of the really worthwhile aspects of the world? Only a static or impersonal conception would exclude such creativity from being part of the order of what is truly worthwhile. Indeed, if the universe is morally constructed (as religion supposes), freedom in some sense must be a supremely precious fact, but precious because it points to an objective law of the structure of the universe—the law that persons ought to create. If the real laws of being are imperatives challenging the infinite person to a perpetual exploration of the infinite, based on imperishable faith in its goodness, it is clear that stagnation or petrification of any cross-section of the temporal order can occur only when the real nature of things is misunderstood. Thus may a metaphysical account of religious life do justice to the facts of experience and reply to positivistic attacks.

The most ancient and most pressing objection to objective religious faith remains to be considered—namely, the fact of evil in life. It is all well enough to dream of a real world of eternal good as an explanation of our experiences of value; but our experiences of value are not the whole of life. Among great masses of the human race, instead of eternal values there is struggle for bare existence; trivial desires and petty interests; torturing agonies of flesh and spirit; sins of the evil will. If anything is objective, the instruction of experience would drive us to say that evil is. Demons, spirits of ill omen, satans, and devils—these are nearly as universal objects of religious belief as is God himself. Whether we confront life as a whole, or its distinctly religious part, we seem to find reasons for regarding the bad as just as universal, real, and objective as the good.

Such dualism is intolerable to religion. But is it not based on a fatal oversight? Does it not neglect that fact that, after all, good is the basic and normative, while evil is a deviation from the good? The nature of good or value may be defined without any reference to evil; witness all definitions of the *summum bonum*. On the other hand, it is impossible to define what you mean by evil without reference to the good. Evil is in-consistency, dis-harmony with the good. Evil implies good as a prior concept; good does not presuppose evil. Thus there is not the same reason for asserting the objectivity of evil as of good.

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;

What was good shall be good, with for evil so much good more;  
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

This consideration does not go far toward solving the problem of evil. Indeed, whatever has been said on that subject has always left irreducible mysteries. Is this a fatal barrier against religious faith in the objectivity of values? It does not seem to religion itself like such a barrier. Nor

does logic require that it be so regarded. What theory about ultimate questions completely solves every problem? The presence of a surd does not invalidate the objectivity of a system. Evil is a problem not satisfactorily solved: so is the relation between mind and body, so is freedom, so is error, so is the value of  $\pi$ . But is it not more reasonable to regard the existence of evil as an incompletely solved problem in a universe in which the deepest reality is good and wholly worthwhile than either to adopt a dualism, or to abandon, with the positivists, the objectivity of good and thus evade the whole problem of evil as a cosmic problem? It behooves us to remember that the last word of religion is faith and hope in God; and that it points to a reality that is infinite and therefore must transcend our powers of interpretation.

Religion, we have found, meets a wide range of the deepest needs of life by its faith that the values which it experiences have an origin and meaning which are more-than-human. The positivistic account denies or abridges some of the most characteristic features of religion. Religion, then, is metaphysical; it is a relation to the supernatural. It is supernaturalism, not as belief in arbitrariness, lawlessness and capricious interventions, but in the more sober sense which holds, negatively, that the realm of nature visible to the senses is not all that is real or all that needs to be explained, and, positively, that the realm of values, especially of those values revealed in religious experience, is objectively and eternally real. Religious thought finds most adequate expression when this realm is interpreted as the life of one Supreme Person.

The foregoing discussion has been an artificial simplification of the problem, with the purpose of centering attention on some implications of religious experience. It is, however, not intended to convey the impression that the whole problem of religious values is solved by pronouncing the shibboleth "objective and metaphysical." On the contrary, it is clear

that objectivity is the problem, not its solution. Positivists and metaphysicians have alike been concerned to interpret objectivity. Positivists have dwelt on the truth that the only world we have is the experienced world; that all objectivity must be found in the interpretation of that world; that the unexperienceable belongs in the outer darkness with all *Dinge an sich*. The transcendent is unthinkable; and if the objectivity of religious values means this, away with it! Thus current pragmatism and new realism, with all their differences, join in a common empiricism. The metaphysicians, while willing to admit that our only business as thinkers is to make the world of experience intelligible, have frequently replied that there is an ineradicable dualism in the cognitive relation. The object to which perception or thought refers is never identical with my act of perceiving or thinking. Even in a world wholly made up of experience stuff there would be a transcendent reference in every cognitive act. When now I refer to my own past or future, I transcend my present psychical state by what Professor Lovejoy calls intertemporal cognition. When I assert that another person is suffering the pangs of despised love, I mean that there is a fact in the universe that transcends my psychical state, and that can never be as it is in itself (namely, for the forlorn one) a fact in my experience.

The metaphysician (if he be an ontological personalist, and a theist) might therefore say to the positivist: I grant that everything to which my thought refers is of the nature of experience (provided the term be allowed to mean all that personal consciousness includes), but at the same time I assert that my object is other than my experience. I assert that knowledge implies transcendence, and also that life forces on us the assumption that my thought can successfully describe that to which it refers. But it does not merely refer to its own past or future or to other persons; it also refers to the world of nature and to God. If other persons have an existence (however psychical) that is not identical with my

“experience of” them, and if nature is not my or our experience of it, may not the Supreme Object of religious valuation likewise have an existence that is other than “our” experiences, however noble, social, and morally useful our experiences may be?

If philosophy of religion is to advance, there must be a clearer definition of such terms as experience, verifiability (and what crimes have been committed in thy name!), objective reference, objectivity, and the like. The present writer desires to call attention to the recent co-operative volume of *Essays on Critical Realism*, edited by Professor Durant Drake. In this volume current epistemological doctrines, pragmatic and neo-realistic alike, are challenged, and the problems stated in a fashion that may turn out to be of significance for philosophy of religion, and in particular for the problem presented in the present paper.